

A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS



U. S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation

Decision Process Guidebook

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The guidebook is meant to be a dynamic document, reflecting what our readers tell us and changes in Reclamation processes. Please check our website for new information:

(<http://www.usbr.gov/guide>)

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Preface

The government has a reputation for being unable to solve problems. Expensive, lengthy studies suggest solutions but lie on a shelf, unfunded. Unsolved problems fester and grow until they are nearly impossible to solve.

People want solutions. People set up the Federal Government to help solve problems that cannot be addressed in any other way. So why does it take so long to do something? Why can't government agencies work with interested and affected organizations, other government entities, and people to solve problems quickly and effectively?

We can. But solutions really happen within a complex of:

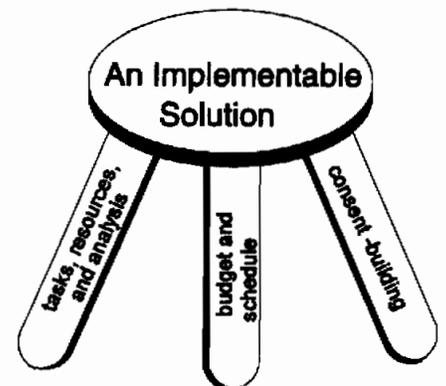
- Diverse, often competing interests
- Interrelated resources and processes
- A history of governmental and private actions

Solutions come from working with groups and individuals who have diverging needs, issues, and concerns. Decisions about developing and protecting resources, managing projects, and meeting needs that fall within the Bureau of Reclamation's (Reclamation) mission, thus, cannot be made quickly or blindly.

So everyone who participates in a Reclamation decision (Reclamation professionals, cooperating State and Federal agencies, consultants, stakeholders, decisionmakers, etc.) needs to understand how decision processes work. This guidebook serves as a ready reference tool for decisionmaking by suggesting flexible processes and techniques for solving problems in as many situations as possible. Rather than quoting regulations by chapter and verse, it leads readers through an adaptable process.

Following a fluid decision process can help participants and decisionmakers reach and implement a confident, balanced decision—one capable of withstanding the scrutiny of multiple publics and even the courts, if necessary. The guidebook describes the underlying purposes and goals of each step in the decision process so that you can adapt the process to your needs and communicate effectively with participants.

This guide is intended to convey the basic underlying concepts behind Reclamation's decision processes. While it may refer the reader to Reclamation policy, it does not represent Reclamation or Department of the Interior policy.



Effective Support for Decision Process

How to Use the Decision Process Guidebook

WHO, ME?

While individual roles and responsibilities vary in Reclamation, we no longer have the luxury of saying "that is not my job; it's the manager's purview. . ." or "this is my territory—and no one else's." We need to contribute our perspectives and insights to solve a wide range of problems.

FATAL FLAWS

Also called train wrecks, these are problems or conflicts that will destroy a solution or process.

You can use this guidebook as a template to solve problems, a quick check to ensure nothing is forgotten, an easy-to-understand explanation of governmental process, an introduction for new employees and participants, etc.

Each decision process is unique and will require variations on the basic theme presented here. This guidebook will help you plan out your decision process. Going through a defined series of steps helps ensure that participants and decision-makers don't make premature decisions, miss participants, or overlook influencing factors. Explaining these steps to participants helps forestall resentment over the time needed for a solution and promotes a balanced decision.

As you go through the decision process steps, take time to analyze what is happening and how participants are reacting. This lets you consider interrelationships between resources and actions and ensures that everyone's concerns are heard. This also helps avoid **fatal flaws** and ensures that workable, effective solutions are found, consented to, implemented, and maintained.

The decision process is really a spiral. New players (interest groups, core team members, politicians, and others) enter the process at various points; new data lead to different evaluations. At times, it seems as though you have skidded back to a "previous step." Actually, you are repeating an action but with a broader, clearer understanding of issues and participants.

Organization

Blue tabs divide the guidebook into an overview, a study foundation, and the decision process steps. We have also included a glossary and bibliography.

The *Overview* is a basic introduction to the decision process. It defines success, provides an overall context, explains the needed ingredients, suggests ways to create an open and effective atmosphere, and discusses real and perceived hurdles.

The **Foundation** is designed to identify problems and lay a solid foundation to solve them. The foundation has two parts. "Figure Out the Problem" covers identifying a problem and formulating a study for submittal to obtain authorization and funding. "Build the Study Foundation" covers developing a foundation after the study is authorized and funding is in place.

The foundation of the process clearly defines the problem and objectives, delineates the playing field, identifies the players and their respective roles, and develops a plan for finding, evaluating, and implementing solutions. Before you go through the decision steps, make sure you have this foundation in place.

Decision Process Steps are detailed explanations of the 10 steps in the process. The content rather than the number of steps is important. Two important aids are placed at the beginning of this section:

- A special "Take Stock" section (the yellow pages at the beginning of this section) provides checklists and reviews. Regular reviews will help keep you from overlooking vital changes.
- A worksheet shows all the steps in the process. Brainstorming answers to each step and listing them in the worksheet can help focus the process. This also provides a handy record for reviewing, making changes, and acquainting new players.

Steps 1 through 10 provide a structure for the decision process:

Step 1: Needs.—Examine the existing knowledge base and gather additional necessary data. Identify the area of influence (problemshed), the existing constraints (legal, physical, etc.), and the resources available. Catalogue the various perceptions of needs from various publics. Identify the publics' issues and concerns.

Step 2: Objectives.—Using this information, determine the objectives (those needs that Reclamation may help to meet). You may need to spend some time separating out underlying, real needs from stated positions. The rest of the decision process will focus on meeting these objectives.

To keep track of the study (and to keep the study on track), participants need to ask the following questions regularly (see "Take Stock"):

- Why are we doing this? (Purpose)
- What are we going to study? (Boundaries)
- Where is our funding and authority? (Authority)
- What is our overall budget? (Constraints)
- Who needs to be involved? (Communication and cooperation)
- Who are the decisionmakers? (Responsibility)
- What are the tasks required? (Work plan)
- Who will do the work? (Organization)
- When do we need the decision? (Schedule)

Our website at:

<http://www.usbr.gov/guide>

provides a hypertext version of the guidebook, with tours designed for short summaries through step-by-step explanations.

Step 3: Resources and constraints.—Figure out what you have to work with—what are the boundaries of the study. Determine the relationships and influences between available resources (physical, social, and political). These resources provide a reality check—they determine how you will be able to meet the objectives. These will provide multiple ways to address each objective.

Step 4: Options.—Brainstorm options or components of solutions. These will provide multiple ways to address each objective.

Step 5: Screening criteria.—Determine standards that each option must meet in order to work. Apply the criteria to each option to develop a set of workable options.

Step 6: Alternatives.—Combine options to form alternatives. Develop a wide range of alternatives. Check each alternative to ensure that it meets the objectives.

Step 7: Evaluation.—Perform analyses so that the alternatives can be compared using the evaluation criteria.

Step 8: Selection.—Present the analyses to the decisionmaker and the public. The decisionmaker can then select a workable alternative, and the public can understand the rationale for the decision.

Step 9: Implementation.—Put the plan in motion. Find and communicate with newly affected and interested publics.

Step 10: Follow up.—Make sure the solution continues to work by providing for maintenance and operation of physical structures and ensuring that institutional solutions continue to address the problem. Examine the situation and change the solution when necessary. Afterwards, discuss the decision process and let others know what worked and what didn't. Carry these lessons over into future problem-solving efforts.

The tools mentioned in the guidebook will help participants:

- Generate ideas on making decisions
- Document the rationale for decision

- Build participation and communication within the team, with decisionmakers, and with the public

The tools we discuss are by no means the only tools available! Don't cast aside a tool or idea because you are unfamiliar with it or because it didn't work. You may need to experiment and adapt tools to your particular uses and needs. Look at our toolbox on the World Wide Web at <http://www.usbr.gov/Decision-Process/toolbox.html> for more information about tools.

To encourage individuals with varying backgrounds and experience to use the guidebook, we have avoided bureaucratic, academic, and technical jargon as much as possible. At times, however, we needed these words to express a point or cite an example. The *glossary* defines these terms.

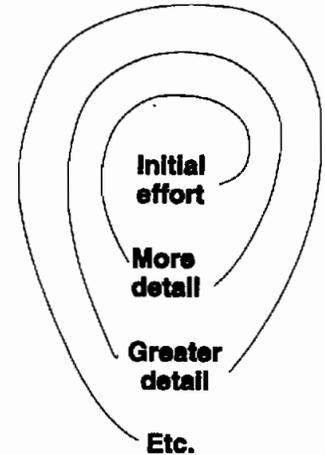
Format

The sidebars in the guides provide capsulized information about particularly important concepts. They also serve as reminders and as a source of index of important material. Generally, words in bold text will alert you to sidebar notations. Use the sidebar column for your notes, too.

Training

We have developed a variety of hands-on training sessions to use the steps we present. Hands-on training varies from a 1-hour workshop applying this process to a simple group decision to a 3-day workshop applying it to particular problemsolving efforts. This training emphasizes the experimental nature of the decisionmaking process. Reading the guidebook or listening to someone explain the process by itself will not teach you how to communicate or follow the process. You have to actually go through it. Training lets you experience the process itself along with an explanation of the process. Students then gain conscious, balanced decisionmaking as one of their personal skills. Please contact Del Holz, (303) 445-2802, or the Environmental Planning and Coordination Office for information about this training.

DETAIL SPIRAL:



The spiraling lines between levels of detail represent ever-increasing data and assessment and evaluation accuracy.